

AGENDA ITEM: 7

CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 4th DECEMBER 2014

**REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND
POLLING STATIONS**

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GOVERNANCE**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To review the Polling Districts, Polling Stations and Polling Places as required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and to advise members of the outcome of the consultation on the current review of polling districts and polling places and seek agreement to proposed changes arising from the review.

BACKGROUND

2. Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a duty on local authorities to 'carry out and complete' reviews of polling districts and polling places between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015, and thereafter every five years.
3. In addition, the review has had regard to the outcome of a review of the Council's electoral ward arrangements undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. That review renamed and reduced the number of wards within the Middlesbrough area from 23 to 20 with effect from the next Council election in May 2015, which in turn has affects the polling districts and polling places review.
4. The remaining timetable for this review is as follows:

Corporate Affairs Committee	4 December 2014
Adoption by Council	10 December 2014
Publication of Outcome	15 December 2014
Arrangements come into force	7 May 2015

at the next Council election

5. A Polling District is defined as the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors.
6. A Polling Place is defined as the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.
7. A Polling Station is the room or part of the building where the poll takes place. These are chosen by the Returning Officer for the election.
8. The aim of the review is to seek that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. The Council must seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
9. The choice of polling place will often be a balance between the quality (access, facilities, etc.) of a building and the distances between the residents and that building compared to other options for polling places.
10. There is no fixed rule on how to decide how this should be done. Councils should be able to show that they followed a reasonable methodology in arriving at their choice.
11. The Electoral Commission, while not having direct responsibility for the review, can intervene where it considers that the reasonable requirements of electors or the needs of disabled electors have not been taken into account.
12. The Commission recommends that there be no more than 2,500 electors per polling station (excluding electors registered for a postal vote).
13. Consideration was given to the cost to the Council of further polling stations. A polling station currently costs approx £800 to hire, equip and staff for polling day.
14. Consideration was given to any further development in the borough in terms of new build residential properties and demolitions.
15. Another key issue for the Council is that when conducting the review, all decisions made must have been consulted upon, measured and practical. The whole process should be as transparent and open as possible to avoid possible conflict.

THE PROCESS

16. As required, the first stage of the review was giving notice. A public notice was published in the Evening Gazette and the Northern Echo and notices were posted in various locations in the town. A list is given in **Appendix 1**.

17. Information was provided on the council's website to inform the public about how to comment on their polling stations.
18. In line with the recommendations of the Electoral Commission, letters and questionnaires were sent to local Members of Parliament and Middlesbrough Councillors.
19. Local disability organisations and black and minority ethnic groups were also consulted. The consultee list is also contained in **Appendix 1**.
20. The Returning Officer was also asked to for her comments and these were posted on the Council website as the initial proposal.
21. Feedback from electors, Polling Station staff, Polling Station Inspectors and Polling Station Managers was also considered from recent elections.
22. Streetscene were approached and consulted in relation to access issue to mobile Polling Stations.

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION – CONSIDERATION BY WARD

23. Consideration has been given to each new Ward, its polling districts and polling places in line with the legislation requirements and taking into account the responses to the consultation.
24. A complete list of proposed Polling Districts and Polling Stations is attached at **Appendix 2**, including details of the number of electors for each Polling District, and the number of voters and percentage turnout for the Local Government/Mayoral elections in 2011 for comparative stations.
25. Maps of each ward showing the proposed polling stations and polling district boundaries can be found in **Appendix 3**.
26. Electoral Services received 5 responses from Councillors, Agents and Parish Clerks; and 4 responses from representatives of community organisations and members of the public see **Appendix 4**.
27. Two stations (Ormesby Methodist Church and Hemlington Hall Academy) have been reinstated as a result of comments made during the review.
28. In the Central Ward, two comments were received suggesting alternatives to the Meeting House, Elder Court polling station, namely the Tees Valley Chinese Community Centre and the International Centre. Electoral Services have considered the locations suggested, but in the interests of voter familiarity have decided to recommend the existing station at Elder Court.
29. In North Ormesby Ward, we were asked to consider the Trinity Centre as an alternative to the North Ormesby Community Hub. We noted this comment but have

decided to recommend the existing station in the interest of voter familiarity, and also the stance of using Council-owned premises wherever possible.

30. A comment was received from a member of the public strongly opposed to the use of Thorntree Primary School. Two alternatives were suggested but unfortunately they do not fall within the polling district. The area was investigated by Electoral Services but no other alternative building was found.
31. It should be noted that Electoral Services continuously review comments regarding Polling Stations from the public, Councillors and other elected representatives and Polling Station staff. Changes are made where necessary and/or desirable. But members are asked to note that it is increasing difficult to find suitable premises; we try to use council owned premises where possible because they are familiar to local residents and are low cost. Mobile Stations are only used when absolutely necessary (and where there is a suitable site), but these Mobile Stations cost approx £1500 each to hire, site, equip and staff. Private premises can also be very expensive.

REASONS FOR PROPOSALS

32. The initial proposals of this review were greatly influenced by both the Local Government Boundary Commission ward boundary review and the results of the consultation. The reduction from 23 ward to 20 has meant that there has been a significant amount of changes to polling districts but not necessarily the number polling stations used. The voter numbers for each district, location of stations and access to enable voters the best possible experience were also a prime considerations. As a result of the significant boundary changes, were possible (and were no issues have been identified) it has been suggested that the council retain the existing polling stations that are familiar to local residents, aiding voter awareness and turnout.
33. The proposed total across the borough will be 68 polling districts/stations (a reduction of 2), including 7 temporary stations.
34. The documents that were initially published and circulated for consultation included detailed maps of each polling district, street listings, turnout figures and the comments of the Returning Officer. Responses have been taken into consideration and below are the final proposals for each ward.
35. Acklam Ward – Retain existing stations at Acklam Branch Library and Middlesbrough District Scout HQ. With the removal of Adcott Road, Bewley Grove and part of Acklam Road from this ward, relocate station from Outwood Academy to Newham Bridge Primary School as this is more centrally located within the polling district.
36. Ayresome Ward – With the boundary changes to the north of the ward, the station formerly at Teesside & District Society for the Blind now falls within Newport Ward. Retain existing station at Whinney Banks School. Relocate temporary station from

West Lane to Northern Road to better serve the whole polling district. A new station has to be provided to serve the south of the ward (formerly in Kader Ward) and unfortunately no suitable building has been identified so it will be necessary to locate a temporary station on Croft Avenue.

37. Berwick Hills & Pallister Ward – Ward boundary changes have affected polling districts. Retain existing stations at Berwick Hills Primary School, Bellamy Court Residents Lounge and St Pius X RC Primary School. Relocate station from Charlbury Road Community Centre to Pallister Park Primary School to better serve those properties formerly in Thorntree Ward. The St Pius X RC Primary School station serves the properties within this ward which are in the Middlesbrough South & East Cleveland Parliamentary Constituency.
38. Brambles and Thorntree Ward – Retain existing stations at Brambles Farm Community Centre, Thorntree Community Hub and Thorntree Primary School. Replace station at the closed Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre with Corpus Christi RC Primary School. Remove temporary station at junction of Merlin Road and Cargo Fleet Lane due to low number of electors. Verbal comments were made by a councillor, on proposed removal however no written submissions were received. The impact of the removal of this station may result in a small community (296) having to cross a major road to access a polling station. Turn out varied between 9 & 29 %. Therefore value for tax payers money has also been considered. Two alternative locations were also suggested to replace the Thorntree School station, however they do not fall within the polling district. The area was investigated by Electoral Services but no other alternative building was found
39. Central Ward – Retain existing stations at Abingdon Primary School, Breckon Hill Community Centre, Europa Building (Teesside University) and Meeting House, Elder Court. Two comments were received suggesting alternatives to the Meeting House, Elder Court polling station, namely the Tees Valley Chinese Community Centre and the International Centre. However, it was felt there were no problems identified with the current station and that local residents are familiar with the venue and therefore to aid consistency for voters the proposal is retain the current venue.
40. Coulby Newham Ward – No Change - Retain existing stations at Langdon Square Community Centre, Lingfield Ash Meeting Hall, Rose Wood Primary School and Sunnyside Primary School. The ward boundary review has little or no effect on the polling districts in this ward.
41. Hemlington Ward - Boundary changes mean that the station formerly at Hemlington Hall Academy now falls within Stainton and Thornton Ward. Retain existing stations at Hemlington Library, Hemlington Recreation Centre, Otterhill Court and Viewley Hill Primary School.
42. Kader Ward – No Change - Retain existing stations at City Learning Centre, Kader Primary School and St. Margaret's Church Hall; and temporary stations at Nature's

World and Thinford Gardens. No issues or comments identified, plus no alternative venues to replace the mobile station.

43. Ladgate Ward - Retain existing stations at Marton Manor Primary School and Residents Association Meeting Room, Broughton Avenue. The Broughton Avenue station serves approximately 20 properties which fall into the Middlesbrough Parliamentary Constituency.
44. Linthorpe Ward – Retain existing stations at Friends Meeting House and Baptist Church Hall. Move station from the Hebrew Prayer Room to Linthorpe Community Primary School as with the removal of streets east of Ayresome Green Lane from this ward the school is more centrally located within the polling district.
45. Longlands and Beechwood Ward – Ward boundaries have changed significantly therefore there are some changes to polling districts for some residents. Retain existing stations at Grove Hill Community Hub, Swerve Table Tennis Centre, The Sutton Centre and temporary station on Kildale Road. Remove station at Gleneagles Court as this is located close to the Sutton Centre and the whole district can comfortably be covered by one station.
46. Marton East Ward – Retain existing stations at Captain Cook Primary School and Marton Community Centre. Add new temporary station at Oval View to serve residential developments north of Ladgate Lane.
47. Marton West Ward – Retain existing stations at Lingfield Primary School and temporary station at Fulford Way. Replace temporary station on Woodrow Avenue with Normanby Court, Linden Crescent.
48. Newport Ward – Changing ward boundaries have varied the polling districts. Retain existing stations at Ayresome Primary School, Newport Settlement, St. Aidan’s Community Church and WMNT Resource Centre. For the properties formerly in Ayresome Ward replace station previously at Goals Soccer Centre/Teesside & District Society for the Blind with St. Cuthbert’s Church Hall as this is more centrally located for residential properties within the district.
49. North Ormesby Ward – Retain existing station at North Ormesby Community Hub. Replace St. Alphonsus’ Church Hall with St. Alphonsus’ RC Primary School as more centrally located within the district following ward boundary changes.
50. Nunthorpe Ward – No change - Retain existing stations at The Brunton Suite, Chandlers Ridge Primary School and The Avenue Primary School. No issues or comments identified.
51. Park End and Beckfield Ward – Retain existing stations at Netherfields Community Centre, Park End Primary School, Southlands Business Centre and Ormesby Methodist Church. The Park End Primary School station covers all the properties in this Ward which are in the Middlesbrough South & East Cleveland Parliamentary Constituency.

52. Park Ward – Ward boundary changes have impacted on the polling districts. Retain existing stations at Linthorpe Community Centre, St. Barnabas Church Hall and St. Edwards RC Primary School. Add new station at Sacred Heart Primary School to serve properties previously in Linthorpe Ward.
53. Stainton and Thornton Ward – Ward Boundary changes have impacted on the polling districts. Retain existing station at Stainton Memorial Hall and add Hemlington Hall Academy (previously a polling station for Hemlington Ward).
54. Trimdon Ward – Retain existing stations at Acklam Whin Primary School and St Clare’s RC Primary School.

RECOMMENDATIONS

55. That the Committee agree the above proposals, which will take effect from the next Council elections on 7th May 2015.
56. That the outcome of the review be published on the Council’s website, along with comments received, and all consultees are thanked for their participation and advised of the new arrangements.
57. That Electoral Services deliver an awareness programme to ensure all electors are familiar with their new polling station. This would include a “find my polling station” postcode lookup on the Council’s website, an article in the Love Middlesbrough magazine and prominent information on the next poll card delivered.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

The Electoral Commission Circular EC19/2010